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DECORATION & FURNITURE

PROPRIETY IN NEEDLEWORK DECORATION.



REVIEW of the past year with regard to the art of decorative needlework would not seem to give any color to the statement sometimes made that the revival of this branch of art has only been a fashion, and is already beginning to fall off. So far from that being the case, there is

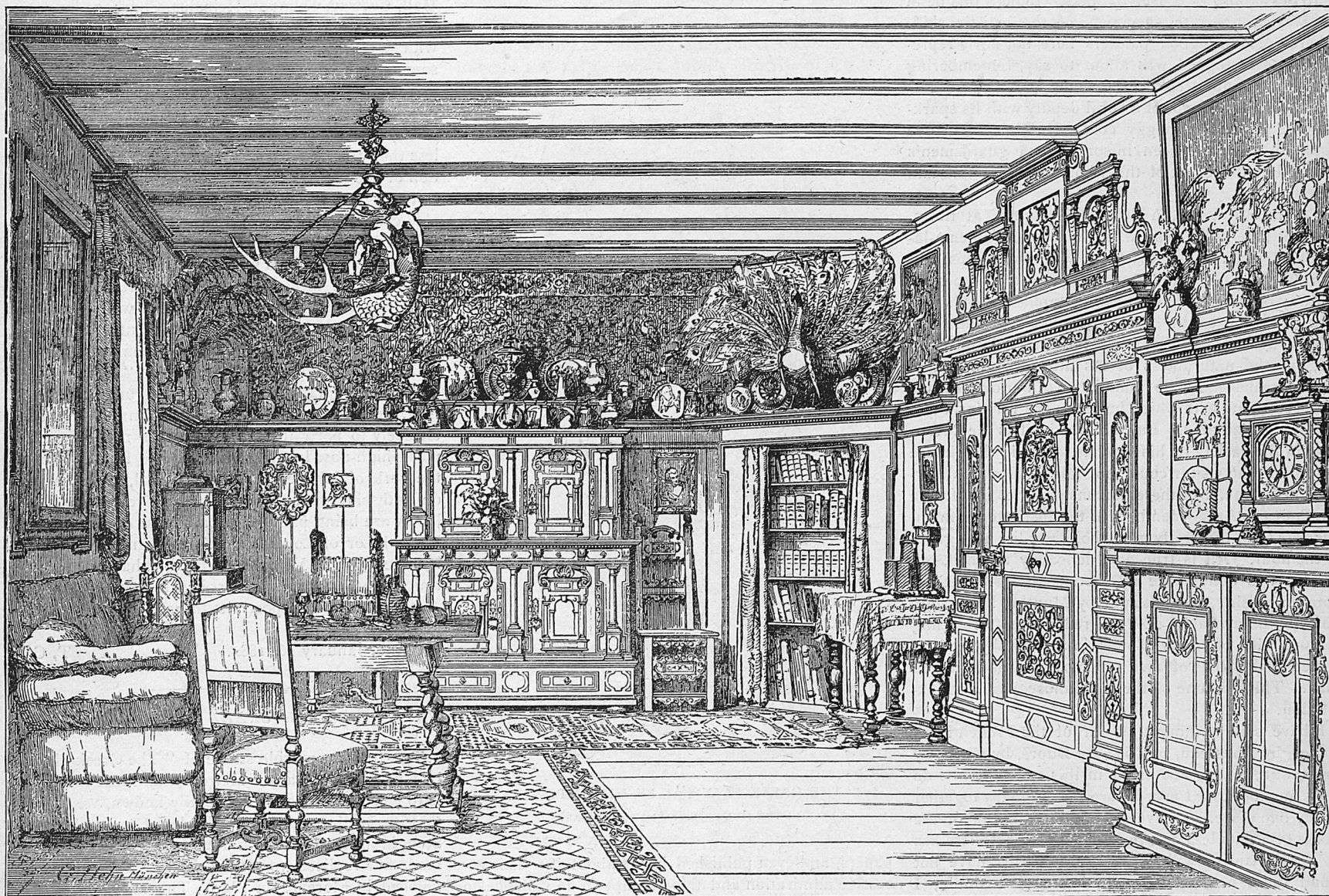
abundant evidence that it is increasing in favor every day, and that truer taste is beginning to prevail among the general public. This is, of course, not the case

two flourishing branches in Glasgow and Edinburgh, while since the Philadelphia Exhibition in 1876, when the exhibits of the Royal School introduced the revived art to America, there have grown up schools in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco—all managed by certificated teachers from the London School, besides numerous other decorative art societies which have included needlework in their prospectus.

There are not wanting signs, however, that among some of these societies it has never been treated as a real branch of art at all, and has scarcely risen above the providing of "fancy work," which simply means a perpetual effort to produce something new and startling to attract the butterfly public. When this is the highest effort of the producer it is needless to say

black velvet and applied to a crimson ground; special reference was made to the cleverness with which a white button with a black head in the centre had been manipulated so as to represent the eye of the living animal! It is not given to many art exhibitions to fall so low as this, but it is only a very little farther down the hill than the stuck-on petals of flowers, or the introduction of real rabbit-skin on the animals intended to be represented on some curtains sent with all good faith to the last Paris Exhibition.

I propose in this and some future letters to draw attention to good specimens of decorative needlework, in the hope that ladies who are fond of embroidery may exercise their technical skill on work of which they will never need to feel ashamed if criticised by an artist. Perhaps of all forms of decorative needle-



SITTING-ROOM AT MUNICH IN THE STYLE OF THE GERMAN RENAISSANCE (ABOUT 1590 TO 1620).

only with regard to decorative needlework. In England there has been within the last few years a decided advance in true art principles, but in no branch has the improvement been more marked than in this, which in the earlier part of this century was in a truly deplorable condition—art, sense, and beauty, either in coloring or design, being conspicuous by their absence from what was then known simply as "fancy work," or, in other words, a pastime for idle women.

The founding of the Royal School of Art Needlework, which only reached its eleventh anniversary in November of last year, was the first initiation of the movement. Since then the taste for embroidery has spread so rapidly throughout the country that hundreds of small societies have sprung up in addition to the agencies of the school in the provinces and the

that there is nothing too ugly or too much at variance with all canons of art to find a place, and it is not surprising to hear of wonderful pieces of so-called "artistic" needlework, in which representations of flowers in relief are executed in pieces of velvet or silk, sewn on exactly to copy the natural petal. While the first principles of decorative art are thus misunderstood, and clever technical imitations are seriously noticed as being of merit, it is useless to expect amateurs to draw the line for themselves, and to discover the difference that lies between true decoration executed in needlework and mere clap-trap fancy work. I remember reading, not long ago, a notice of a local art exhibition, in which attention was quite seriously drawn to the beautiful execution of a cushion, the decoration of which consisted of a cat cut out in

work the most effective and at the same time the most artistic is that which is executed on linen or silk, with the background darned in. A design should be chosen which covers the ground well and evenly. No spaces "to let" must be found in it—no weedy-looking stalks supporting flowers obviously too heavy for them. If scrolls are introduced in the Renaissance style they must bear a proper proportion to the rest of the design, and neither crush it with their weight—reminding one of the fabled mountain delivered of a mouse—nor be drawn so weak and feeble that one feels instinctively that the leaves and flowers must sooner or later break away from it altogether. There must be no vases holding groups of flowers which could not possibly get into them—except by supposing them to be stalkless and miraculously supported in the

air—and no flowering design springing from nothing and ending nowhere in particular. Common-sense and a little study of proportion which is open to every one, will always guide an amateur in the production of good work.

Having outlined the whole of the design with stem-stitch, the background may be begun. It should be darned with crewel or about two strands of filoselle. The length of the stitches taken in darning must be as even as possible, or the effect will be ragged and uneven. It may be lightly or heavily worked, according to the taste of the worker, but the great thing to aim at is evenness and accuracy of line. The material on which the work is done is generally a sufficient guide; but, if necessary, pencil lines may be drawn with a ruler as a help. The design itself may then be worked up to any extent. Solid pieces of embroidery in satin-stitch or long and short-stitch or French knots are very effective.

There are many honeycomb or lace backgrounds which may be used in the same way as darning; but they are not so satisfactory or artistic. A very beautiful effect may also be produced by varying the colors of the background, and letting them blend one into another. A specimen now on view at South Kensington has a background darned on linen in yellow, shading to orange and red, which has all the beauty of a sunset effect. When this is done the graduation of the colors must be very delicate, and no hard lines must be left in the darning; one shade should run up into another, so as to produce a general effect of blending.

The advantage of this work is that it may be done in the hand, which to the amateur is always an attraction. It is suitable for cushions, curtain borders, and bedspreads, but not for chair seats, as the rubbing of the grounding silk would soon make them look shabby. Any well-covered "all-over" design is suitable. In choosing one should bear in mind always the size of the spaces which are to be covered by the grounding. The smaller these are and the more evenly balanced the better the general effect will be.

LONDON, January 25, 1884.

ARACHNE.

STENCIL DECORATION.

THE mere manual part of rubbing color through the holes cut or "stencilled" through a sheet of tough paper is mechanical, but the arrangement of that color, so as to be artistic, raises the work to an art. For a really successful painting, no one part of any of the various patterns should attract the eye to the exclusion of the rest; one part of a design may be brighter than another, to bring that portion forward, and thus assist the design, but never so as to exclude

all appreciation of the softer tints surrounding it. Neither are great varieties of pattern desirable; a building painted with half a dozen well-grouped designs will look better than one upon which a complicated and incongruous medley of "stencils" has been used.

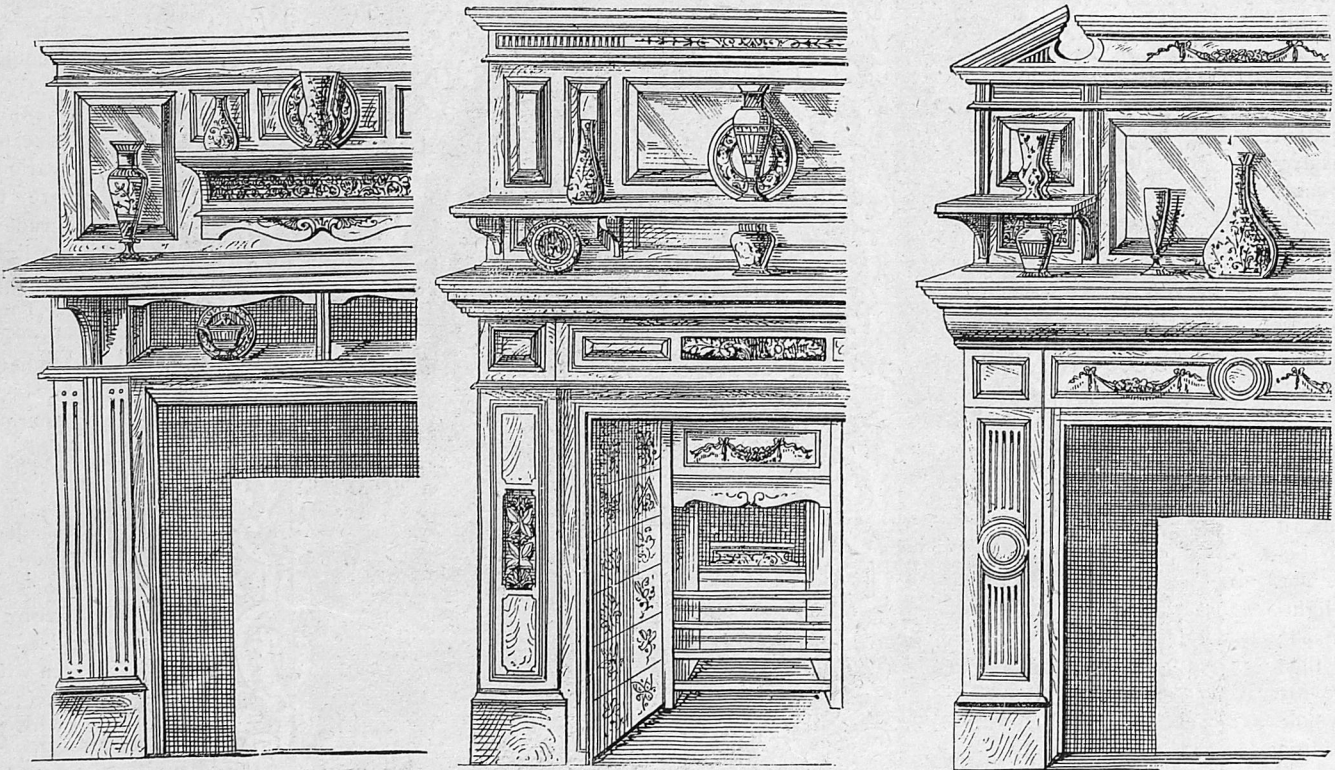
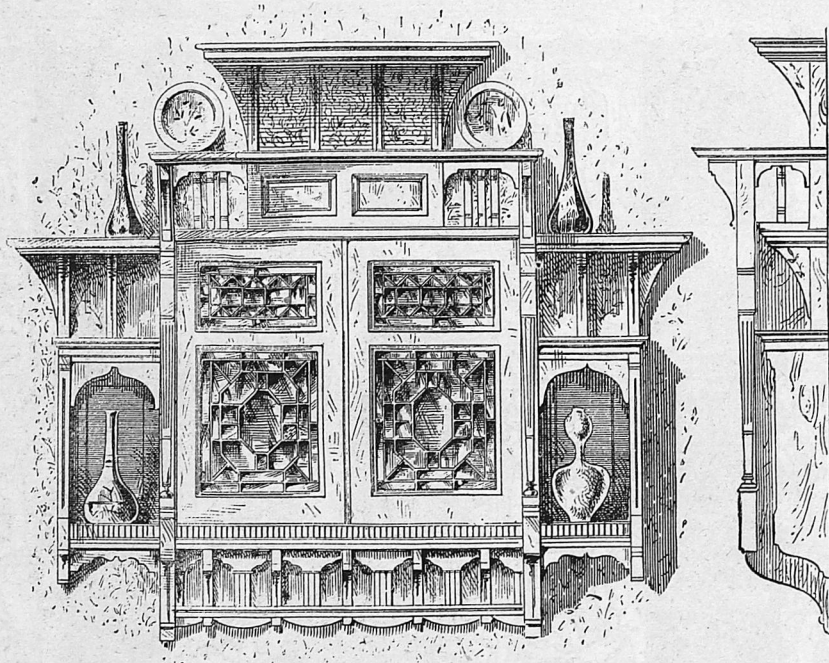
Stencilling is applied to the decoration of churches, public buildings, and private houses, and it is worked either in water or oil colors. The cost of water-color stencilling is trifling, as powder colors, size and water are all that are used, and it can be applied much more easily and quickly than oils; therefore it is generally used in decorating those parts of a building which are not likely to be rubbed against. Its one

richer tints are obtained by the use of oils than with water colors.

The following materials are required for water-color stencilling: Colors in powder, size, stencil brushes, stencil knife, mahlstick, T square, foot rule, earthen pots of various sizes, string and lead weight, knotting varnish, stencil patterns, and gilder's requisites. To these are added, in oil-color stencilling, linseed oil, japanner's gold size, turpentine, and patent driers. The powder colors can be obtained from any oil-and-color dealer, but must be well and finely ground, or, when mixed, they will be lumpy. The brushes made expressly for the work are short, thick-handled, and with strong hairs cut straight at the end. A few ordinary sable brushes are necessary to work in fine parts of the patterns. The foot rule, T square, and lead are required to mark out accurately upon the wall guiding lines, either horizontal, perpendicular, or slanting, before the pattern is applied, as unless these details are perfect the best design will fail.

The stencil plates or patterns are made either of thin tin or cartridge paper. The latter is the best material for an amateur; it is not so heavy to hold in the hand, and, when covered with knotting varnish, is very durable. The plates are bought ready cut out, or made as follows: Take a piece of strong cartridge paper, eighteen inches long and twelve inches wide (the width depends upon the width of the design), and upon this draw the design; leave an inch margin round it, and remember that the parts between the lines drawn

are those that are to be cut away, and through which the paint is rubbed on to the wall. Examine carefully every detail of the pattern, noting if, when cut, any part of it that should remain will become detached from want of a support, and where this occurs make what are called "tags," i.e., leave thin strips of paper across the cut-out parts, so as to support the portion likely to fall out by attaching it to a solid part. Never cut out any pattern until these "tags" have



MANTELPieces AND HANGING CABINET.

EXAMPLES OF MODERN ENGLISH WORK. FROM THE LONDON FURNITURE GAZETTE.

fault is a want of durability, which is noticeable as soon as it is subject to pressure or damp from the heated atmosphere of a room—the color, not being fixed in a substance that resists water, becomes dissolved and runs away. Oil color, though more expensive, is more durable, and will always resist atmospheric damp or pressure; it is, however, affected by internal damp, such as comes out from stone or brick not properly dried, the moisture from the wall forcing itself through the oil color and carrying the color with it in flakes. Oil colors are used after a wall has been plastered and "stopped" with a coating of glue size, for the lower parts of halls, sitting-rooms, and churches, and also where the decoration is required to be brilliant in color, as deeper and

been marked out, as should a portion of the design become detached the pattern is useless. In ecclesiastical and conventional designs these tag-lines are frequently left and not painted out when the work is finished, as they convey a certain stiffness to the design that suits the intention of the work, but in ordinary patterns they are painted over after the stencil plate has been removed. If the design cannot be completed in the length of one stencil plate, continue it upon a second, which so arrange that some of the pattern upon the last part of the first plate is repeated on the first part of the second, so that all difficulty of joining the two is obviated. Prepare several plates of the same design, as they become wet after use, and require to be left for a time to dry. To cut